

The Successful Attorney-Client Relationship



Provided By Cameron Law PLLC

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Working With Your Attorney

A good attorney-client relationship involves trust and cooperation. Here are 10 tips to consider to establish a successful working relationship with your attorney

1. GIVE YOUR ATTORNEY COMPLETE AND CANDID INFORMATION.

Any detail might be critical to your case. By knowing all the facts, your attorney can determine what may be your best legal options. Facts that may seem unimportant or trivial to you may actually have significant legal impact on your case or legal matter. Even if you are embarrassed or unsure about sharing certain facts, you should share them with your attorney. Remember, the attorney-client relationship is one of the few legal relationships where discussions or communications between the attorney and the client are legally and strictly confidential.

2. PREPARE FOR PHONE CALLS AND MEETINGS WITH YOUR ATTORNEY.

Organize your materials and information before you talk with your attorney. Prepare a written summary or detailed notes that outline your problems and questions. Depending on the case or legal matter, a summary should include the names, addresses and phone numbers of anyone involved in your matter. Remember to bring relevant documents to your first interview and be prompt for all appointments.

Be as brief as possible in all interviews and stick to business; socializing is expensive if you are paying an attorney by the hour. While your attorney will provide advice on legal matters, you are usually much better off consulting with a professional therapist to work through any emotional issues that often accompany legal problems.

3. ALWAYS KEEP YOUR ATTORNEY INFORMED

Tell your attorney immediately of changes or new information that might affect your case. Meaningful and responsive communication is very important. Your case can change without warning, and your attorney needs to be fully informed of any changed circumstances.

If your attorney asks you to gather information about your case, do so promptly. Make a checklist of what you need to do, or ask the attorney to make a checklist for you.

If you change your address, phone number, or employment, inform your attorney of the changes.

If you receive any new documents that relate in any way to your case, immediately give them to your attorneys.

4. ASK YOUR LAWYER QUESTIONS

If you have questions about anything involved in your legal matter, then ask your attorney for an explanation. To serve you effectively, your attorney must trust that you understand your case and the legal process.

5. TRUST YOUR LAWYER

Be prepared to make full and honest disclosure of everything about your legal issue, including facts that may be unfavorable or embarrassing to you. Strict professional rules for attorneys require that the attorney keep information about you and your matter confidential.

If you are concerned about the confidential nature of your communications with your attorney, tell your attorney and discuss your expectations about confidentiality at the start.

6. TALK ABOUT LEGAL FEES AND CHARGES AT YOUR FIRST VISIT

Your attorney should talk to you about the cost of representing you at your first meeting.

An attorney cannot always determine exactly what the fees will be because estimating the amount of work involved can be difficult. Attorneys, however, can usually estimate a range of fees for particular work or give you an idea of the issues involved and the time and general cost required.

Attorneys usually charge a fee based on hourly rates, on flat or "fixed" rates, or on contingency. In most cases you will also have to pay legal expenses, such as filing fees, copying costs, long distance telephone charges and legal research fees. Some attorneys may be open to negotiating fees and even monthly payment plans. Whatever you choose, make sure your agreement with your attorney is in writing, and keep a copy of the agreement for your records.

Remember to pay the bills from your attorney on time, as many attorneys will stop working on your behalf if you fail to pay your fees when they are due. Although an attorney must protect a client's interests, an attorney usually has a right to withdraw from representing a client because of legal bills that have not been paid.

7. AGREE ON A REPORTING PROCEDURE

Your attorney should report to you regularly on the progress of your case. Discuss how frequently you would like to be updated and how you want to be updated on the progress of your case. Your attorney should be able to update you based on your stated preferences, such as e-mail, mail or by phone.

Remember, your attorney is working for you. If you have any questions about your case, you should be able to contact your attorney. If you are paying an hourly rate for your attorney's time, asking several questions at once, rather than calling each time a question arises, may be more cost-effective for you.

8. *KNOW WHAT YOU ARE SIGNING*

Read all documents before you sign them to make sure the documents are complete, accurate and represent your understanding of the agreement or document. Ask your attorney to explain anything you do not understand. If you do not ask your attorney, your attorney will probably assume that you understand the document you are signing.

9. *KEEP YOUR OWN CASE FILE*

Keep copies of all agreements, letters, and other documents prepared on your behalf. This can help you understand the progress being made on your case and assist you when you talk to your attorney. Maintaining a separate and organized file of your own will also allow you to review documents with your attorney by telephone or by e-mail, which can save you the time and expense of an office visit.

10. *LISTEN TO YOUR ATTORNEY*

Your attorney is your advocate and has a duty to protect your interests. Listen to your attorney, and do not hire an attorney you do not trust.

Remember that your attorney's judgment about your matter is based on legal experience and training and that the best legal advice for you may not be what you actually want to hear. No attorney can be expected to win every case, nor should your attorney promise to win your case.



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This pamphlet contains general information and not legal advice. It is based on Minnesota law in effect at the time of writing. A lawyer can advise you about how the law applies to your specific situation

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